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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO  
TO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001921

SENSITIVE  
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WHA FOR DAS DMROBINSON, WHA/CAR FOR WSMITH, BPREMONT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/12/2013  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [KJUS](#) [VE](#) [DR](#)  
SUBJECT: REFORM OF THE REFORMISTA PARTY - THE DREAM IS ALIVE

REF: A. SDO 1513  
[1](#)B. SDO 1666  
[1](#)C. SDO 1717  
[1](#)D. SDO 1296

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Classified By:  
Classified By: Robert Fannin, Ambassador, Reasons 1.4(b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Poloff met with Victor "Ito" Bisono, a rising star of the falling Reform Party (PRSC) to discuss prospects for the party's revival - an on-going saga (ref A). Although some Dominicans have already dismissed the party as a thing of the past, Bisono has a different vision: He predicts that the Fernandez government will have a tough time this coming year, given the global economic down-turn. This, in turn, will provide the PRSC (Partido Reformista Social Cristiano) with an opportunity to rally its militants and like-minded politicians from other movements. Bisono recognizes that the first step, however, is for the PRSC to loosen the grip of ex-PRSC Presidential candidate Amable Aristy's followers on the party's Political Committee and other organs. To this end, Bisono and others are working to insert people with more modern ways of thinking and acting into key positions by March 2009. Intriguingly, Foreign Minister Morales Troncoso is in on this plan, Bisono suggested, even if the FM will remain at his post for the next 12-18 months. It remains to be seen whether Reformista party reforms will succeed and whether Morales will then jump from Fernandez's ship. End Summary.

The Vision Thing  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) For Bisono, the answer to the nation's systemic dysfunctions includes the mobilization of entrepreneurs "such as the owners of this cafe" (in which the meeting took place on 12/12). This constituency wants to see the law enforced, corruption reduced and infrastructure maintained. As things stand, Bisono feels, "working Dominicans" do not benefit, the country's image suffers and the end result may be state failure. He pointed to Venezuela as an example of what could happen if even "democratic" political parties fail to serve the public interest over time.

[1](#)3. (C) Bisono also foresees that the Fernandez administration will face mounting difficulties over the coming year, largely due to the global economic crisis. Moreover, he added, Fernandez has no "vertical" control over his party, relying instead on spreading access to power and funding among those willing to lend support - i.e., clientism. (Note: Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso is a classic case of this - somebody from another party who, in return for a government

position, hitches himself to the Fernandez wagon - for now. The President's non-partisan clientism is also causing members of his own party to grumble. End Note) As the administration stumbles along in the coming year or so, Bisono predicts, the PRSC will have the opportunity to come back from near oblivion as a responsible opposition party.

#### Possible Plan of Action

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¶4. (C) The problem, Bisono knows, is how to deal with what he termed a "hard core" within the party that still sees the party more as a means for pursuing self-interests than as a mechanism for formulating policies, mobilizing voters and pursuing national development. In his reform drive, Bisono said he has the support of Santiago's very effective Mayor, Jose Enrique Sued (ref B), and that qualified people with experience in the private sector or the world outside the DR are currently contacting him about how they might serve in various organs of the PRSC.

¶5. (C) Bisono indicated that Fernandez's own Foreign Minister supports the effort to infuse new blood into the party's leadership. Indeed, Bisono hinted that while he will become the Secretary General of the party, Morales will return to the party, as its leader, in about 18 months - once the rebuilding of the party bears fruit.

¶6. (SBU) When asked what program the PRSC leadership might rally around, Bisono mentioned three subjects - dear to the heart of "conservatives" to whom the PRSC is supposed to appeal: energy, immigration and security. The country has run up too many debts associated with dependency on hydrocarbons, the border with Haiti is wide open (ref C), and crime, not least narco-trafficking, is on the rise (ref D). While he recognizes the need for the DR to address education

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issues - about which he recently published an editorial - he does not believe that more effort on education can translate into near-term political benefits for the party.

#### Who Will Save the PRSC?

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¶7. (C) Comment: An editorial in the newspaper "Hoy" asked this question on November 26. Bisono seemed to confirm that answer will be him - as Secretary General - and several others, including Mayor Sued. The editorial opined that Joaquin Ricardo (ref A) will become the PRSC's president, but in Bisono's account, that may be temporary - until Morales chooses to pull the plug on Fernandez.

¶8. (SBU) Comment (cont'd.): Bisono is also hoping that other Christian Democratic or conservative parties, and related international groups, will help the PRSC develop and "form" new and better party cadres. Given that the USG recognizes the need for all democratic countries to have an effective opposition, he hopes that we will underscore that message to our Dominican interlocutors, in and out of the PRSC. Such words of encouragement - if not of warning - will go some distance, he indicated, towards ensuring that the country does not drift into a crime-crippled, "caudillo-light" system, headed indefinitely by Fernandez. End Comment.  
FANNIN